

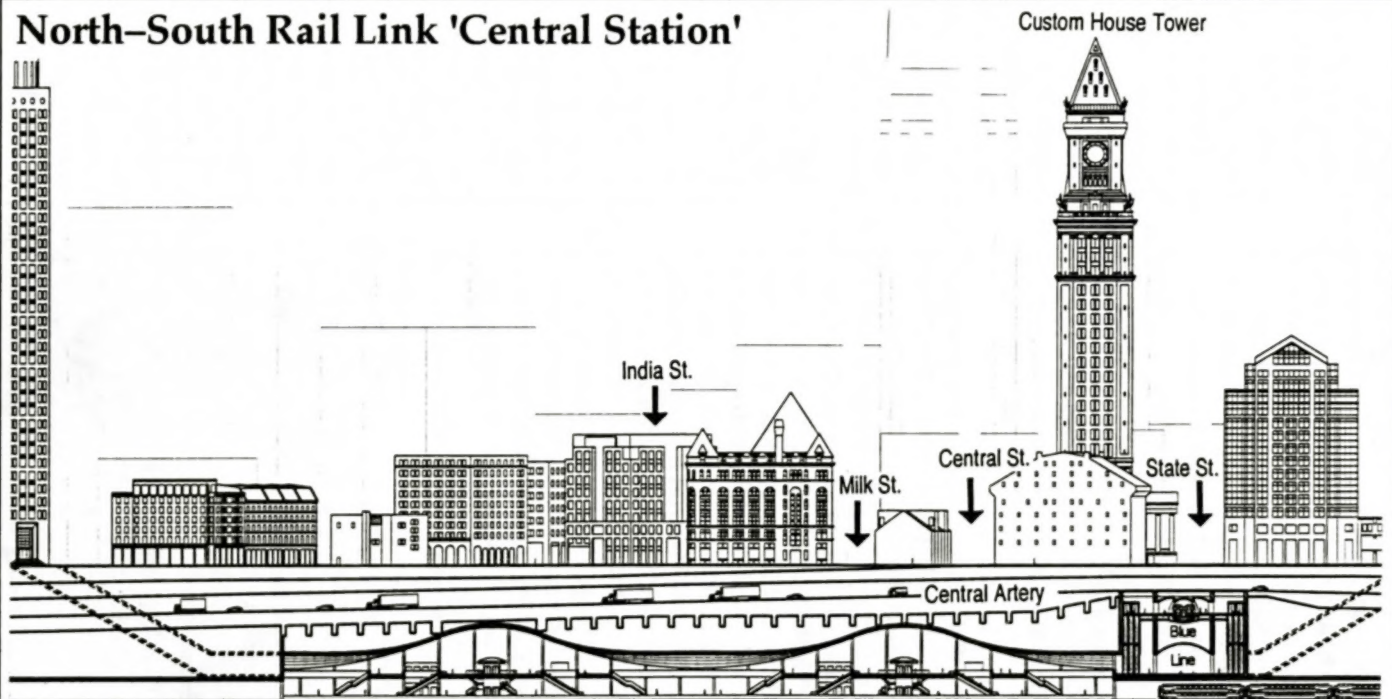
THE BOSTON INFORMER

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The newsletter for people who care about Boston

November-December 1996

North-South Rail Link 'Central Station'



The proposed North Station-South Station Rail Link's "Central Station" has survived a near-death experience and apparently is back in the Rail Link plans. The proposed station would be under the MBTA Blue Line Aquarium station at State Street and was considered an essential project element because it would provide access to the underserved Financial District, provide an easy transfer point to Logan Airport and would connect another MBTA line to the commuter rail system.

However, the prospect of building this complex station in the financial and tourist districts was reflected in the estimated cost for the station: \$250 million. So while planners considered dropping the Central Station, claiming that people could easily walk to the financial district from North Station platforms that will extend almost to Haymarket, South Station turned out to be the problem. The number of pedestrians at South Station will triple with the Rail Link, and the without the Central Station, it would be impossible to move all those people through. So despite the cost, the Central Station is back!

Source: MBTA North-South Rail Link/Domench Hicks & Krockmalnic Architects

Noisy CA/T Disturbs Sleep—Trying to get back on schedule, the Central Artery/Tunnel (CA/T) project is planning to work essentially 24 hours a day on mainline construction for the next five to ten years, despite the impact of nighttime noise on abutting residential areas. The resulting neighborhoods rebellion has spread from Chinatown, Leather District, Fort Point Channel, and Downtown/Waterfront to the North End—anywhere residents are trying to sleep.

Still in dispute is whether nighttime construction in residential areas is allowed under the CA/T's own Final Environmental Impact Report or City of Boston construction regulations. The most obvious solution is to cut back on construction hours to 16 hours per day. The CA/T project counters, saying such a cutback would prolong the project by one to three years. Residents and others have suggested alternatives for more efficient daytime work, such as bigger work zones and improved traffic management.

The biggest single cause of neighborhood noise-related complaints is from back-up alarms on construction equipment and trucks. After maintaining for years that back-up alarms are mandated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the CA/T project now admits there are many other OSHA-approved alternatives and is "studying them." Other noise mitigation measures such as sound barriers, muffled equipment, more sound-proof windows in some areas, etc., are also being examined.

MassPike Ramp Study Update

Virtually since the MassPike extension opened in 1961, the Turnpike Authority has looked at ways to improve westbound access to the Back Bay—the first westbound exit is now Allston. The [1996] Boston Extension Ramps Feasibility Study (BERFS) now has six alternatives that have been looked at by consultants F. R. Harris/Stone & Webster for the Tri-Agency of MassPike, Boston Transportation Department and Boston Redevelopment Authority. Consultants gave an update and told neighborhood and business groups the goal is to examine the feasibility of additional on- and off-ramps between Kenmore Square and I-93 to serve traffic accessing the Back Bay.

Of the six alternatives shown, none appears feasible to the consultants and community. Pressure for the recent study has come after Central Artery/Tunnel project plans for Ramp DD in South Cove were criticized for forcing high volumes of traffic to use Ramp DD to access the Back Bay.

The study may be extended until April 1, 1997, one year after the original target completion date, and may be modified after recent announcements for a hotel, commercial and entertainment complex using MassPike air rights at Massachusetts Avenue.

The next public meeting is scheduled for January 23, 1997.

People Movers

Geoff Slater, from MBTA director of planning, to extended vacation far, far away
Hasty Evans, state senate election-day loser, to MBTA director of planning
Gordon Barnes is retiring from the Boston Public Works Department
Marisa Lago, BRA/EDIC director, to the Securities and Exchange Commission
Andrew M. Paven is the new official spokesman for the Central Artery/Tunnel project. He formerly was a spokesman for the Federal Highway Administration and the Dukakis presidential campaign.
Peter Blute, Congressional election-day loser, to Massport executive director
Connie Kastelnick has left as spokesman for the Central Artery/Tunnel project to do consulting on her own.
Jim Brett, former Dorchester state representative, to head of the N.E. Council
Bennett Heart, from office of the Attorney General, to staff attorney at the Conservation Law Foundation
Evelyn Addante, from Massport, to Boston Redevelopment Authority
Maurice Lewis, former Boston newscaster, to MBTA communications department

1 Development in the North Point area of Cambridge has begun. The Congress Group broke ground for its office and residential towers in late November. The development will include 435 residential units, a 490-car garage, and 15,000 s.f. of support retail space. Access will be from a new road off Monsignor O'Brien Highway; the intersection will be signalized. The Congress Group will give \$1 million to the Metropolitan District Commission as part of the Chapter 91 Waterways license agreement for the development.

5 Water ferries from Quincy to Logan Airport recently began service. The 22- to 25-minute ride from the Quincy shipyard leaves every hour, on the hour and starts at 5:00 a.m., in plenty of time to catch the early-bird flight out. There are no runs at noon and 1:00 p.m. and the service stops at 9:00 p.m. One-way fare is \$10.00 and day parking in Quincy is \$2.00, \$6.00 overnight. The service is operated for Massport by Harbor Express (subsidiary of General Dynamics) uses a brand-new, Massachusetts-built, 88-foot catamaran "Flying Cloud" (after the famous Clipper Ship) and carries 149 passengers at 30 knots. Service also began on December 16 from Quincy to Long Wharf. For information call (617) 376-8417.

2 Despite not having the winning bid, Northeastern University is still interested in acquiring the former **Registry Building on Parcel 18 at Ruggles station**. Bank of Boston bought the distressed building at auction, topping three others with a \$10 million bid. Closed since July 1995 when workers became sick with respiratory problems, the building had undergone substantial repairs before the state decided it would not return. Northeastern University, whose parking lots, garage, Engineering building and Columbus Place building abut Parcel 18, expressed interest in the site for a planned 900-car garage. Northeastern officials said it would build the garage for student parking and move the Criminal Justice school into the Registry building.

3 The Suffolk University Law School project at 110-120 Tremont St. (corner of Bromfield Street) finally is entering Phase 2—construction of the law school. Phase 1 involved the controversial demolition of two buildings. An unusual Memorandum of Agreement between the University and preservation agencies prevented interim use of the lot for parking and levied fines if construction did not begin in 31 months.

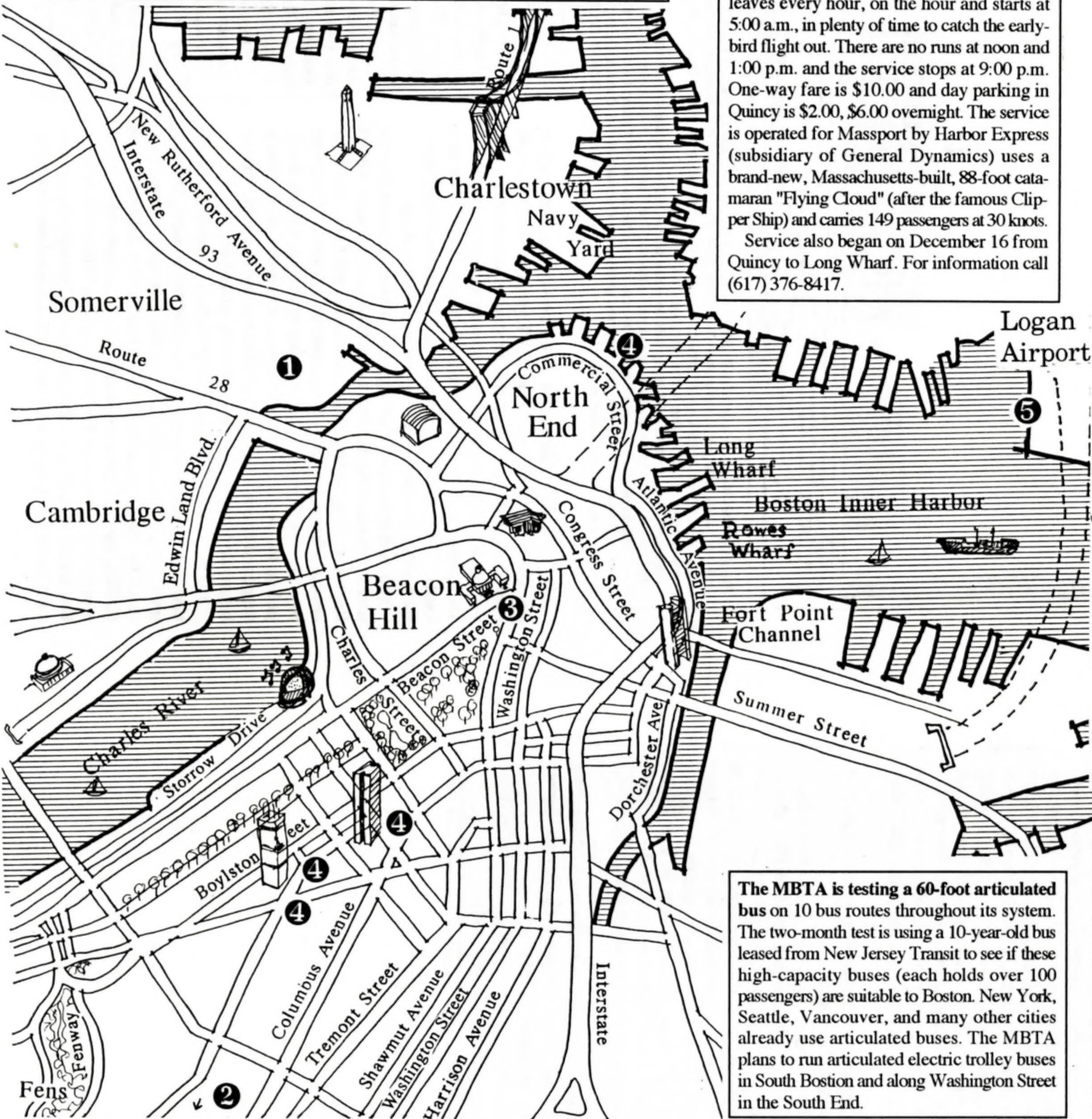
The proposed 250,000 s.f., seven-story building will house academic, administrative, food, conference, library and bookstore functions. The steel construction will be clad in light-colored stone panels for the sense of an older stone building that will be compatible with the surrounding historic context. Underground restricted parking for 72 cars (66 for faculty/staff) and bicycle parking will be provided from Hamilton Street.

Construction is expected to start in fall 1997 and be completed in mid-1999. Architect: Tsoi/Kobus & Associates.

4 A 1990s "back to the city" movement is underway as **downtown residential development** is taking off. One leader is Paul Roiff of Heath Properties who is creating living spaces downtown, on Piano Row and in Back Bay.

At 15 Beacon St., 72 hotel rooms are planned for the former School Department/Public Facilities Department building. Three Boylston Street properties opposite the Boston Common are being assembled for residences, hotel or office use, with the Boston Redevelopment Authority taking 146 Boylston St. by eminent domain to combine it with Roiff's two contiguous parcels. And on Columbus Avenue in the Back Bay/South End, Heath Properties is transforming the Cahners Building into condominiums, a restaurant, and parking for residents.

Other recent and planned residential developments include: Emerson College's new 80 Boylston St. dorm, Suffolk University's dorm at 150 Boylston St., planned Battery Wharf rental units, planned Custom House Tower (80 one-bedroom suites), Board of Trade Building on State Street (planned 95 furnished apartments, 50 luxury suites), 25 Huntington Avenue, Fensgate and Charlesgate (from dorms to rental), and controversial Huntington Avenue Colonnade Residences.



The MBTA is testing a 60-foot articulated bus on 10 bus routes throughout its system. The two-month test is using a 10-year-old bus leased from New Jersey Transit to see if these high-capacity buses (each holds over 100 passengers) are suitable to Boston. New York, Seattle, Vancouver, and many other cities already use articulated buses. The MBTA plans to run articulated electric trolley buses in South Boston and along Washington Street in the South End.

Blue Line Blues...As one mitigation measure to increase public transportation capacity before Central Artery/Tunnel (CA/T) project construction disrupts downtown traffic, the Blue Line stations were to be expanded to accommodate six-car trains (currently four-car trains) by lengthening platforms. This six-year project (11 stations) cost over \$465 million.

However, work on two of the major stations, Airport and Aquarium, has not even begun despite CA/T mainline construction starting to move into full swing. Under the current schedule Aquarium station will not be renovated until 2004—after peak CA/T construction, thus negating the stated reason for the expansion.

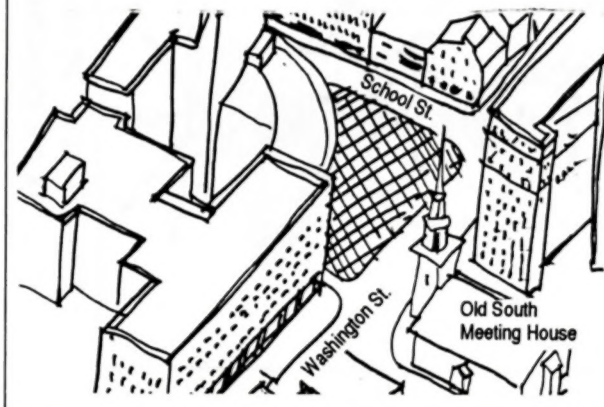
To the horror of residents and businesses, rumors have circulated that to allow six-car trains sooner, Aquarium station would be closed. In the meantime, independent of Blue Line expansion plans, Aquarium station desperately needs major renovation now, especially the hopelessly unreliable escalators.

Related news: Massport released the ridership analysis of the proposed people mover that would run between Airport station and the terminals and an upgraded bus service alternative. The lower-cost bus alternative would attract 8,900 daily Blue Line riders, but the \$300 million people mover would attract only additional 1,600 daily riders. And transit use to Logan would still be a paltry 12 percent. Wonder how many Logan Express operations could be set up with \$300 million....

A permanent memorial marking the **150th anniversary of the Great Potato Famine** in Ireland that claimed nearly one million lives is planned for the Boston Borders Bookstore plaza at Washington and School streets in Downtown Crossing.

The memorial will reflect on the catastrophe that changed the history of Boston by bringing thousands of Irish immigrant families to Boston's shores. The 7,000-s.f. site on the Freedom Trail is presently owned by the City of Boston and the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

A major sculptural piece or pieces will serve as the memorial's focal point. Artist selection is now underway, and the project's completion date is March 17, 1998. Thomas J. Flatley is chairing the committee spearheading the project.



The MBTA's Transit Mitigation Program has taken a dramatic turn, shifting from spending about \$2.6 billion for transit improvements to meet clean air requirements of the Central Artery/Tunnel (CA/T) project to a series of low-cost measures that some would describe as "unkering."

Agreements in the early 1990s committed the state to major projects to expand, improve, increase and upgrade transit to comply with environmental mandates and to absorb commuters shifting from cars during construction. However, when federal funds were denied, the state shifted the burden to the MBTA, which is unable to fund these improvements.

But the CA/T's plans have maintained existing automobile access. As a result, the MBTA states, traffic disruptions are minimal and "major shifts from automobiles to transit are not anticipated." And a good thing, too, says the MBTA, since "ridership growth could significantly increase crowding...."

All this despite state studies, such as a 1992 Deloitte & Touche report calling for increasing tolls and seeking funds from other agencies for transit.

So the MBTA has decided to scratch around for money to modify commuter rail schedules, lease unused church parking lots, subsidize private buses that offer coordinated ticketing, market transit, run the Riverside line to Lechmere....

Welcome to The Boston Informer!

The goal is simple: provide concise public information on construction projects, planning initiatives, and whatever else affects living and working in Boston. Welcome to *The Boston Informer*!

The Boston Informer is published by ATC Information, Inc., six times yearly in Boston, Massachusetts. President: Anthony Casendino; vice-presidents, Anne McKinnon, Chris Fincham.

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**Hey, it may be noise to you, but
it's a paycheck to me!**

You were asking...

Q. How can I report parking violations in Boston?
A. Residents are encouraged to call the Boston Transportation Department for all parking violations. Call 635-4881 or 3125 before 6:00 p.m. After 6:00 p.m., call 635-3900. [Source: The Regional Review]

Q. I hear the MBTA Board of Directors finally approved the contract for the Urban Ring study. What is it?
A. Phase I of the Urban Ring/circumferential transit Major Investment Study, funded by a \$1.1 million Federal Transit Administration New Starts grant, involves a comprehensive study of alternatives to improve crosstown mobility. The 16-month study will look at a number of possible modes, alignments and systems. The product will be a Preferred Investment Strategy that will advance the most promising mobility options to Phase II for detailed analysis and preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Study. To be added to a mailing list for the public meetings (seven are planned), call 222-3366.

Q. What is happening with the development proposals for the Park Plaza site?
A. The Park Plaza citizens advisory committee voted to support the proposal submitted by MDA Plaza Assoc. (of Macomber Development) for a hotel and residential development over the hotel-only proposal of Sawyer Enterprises. However, Sawyer Enterprises noted it owns a portion of the site, and that the price for the rights to that portion might be a problem. Perhaps the Boston Redevelopment Authority will exercise its eminent domain rights here, also.

Q. Is it my imagination or has traffic on the MassPike gotten worse since the new chairman, James Kerasiotes, took over in July?
A. No. You must not have been given one of those "handsome mugs" at the toll booth....

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